

Fanny E. Cole

THE ❀ STORY ❀ OF ❀ THE
LORING-GREENOUGH HOUSE



THE MANSION OF COMMODORE JOSHUA LORING
From an old print

Neither for gold
Nor for gifts
did I undertake
this work so great
and difficult--
only I prayed that
my work might
be beautiful

*Dedication of a book
in Gaelic by a monk of
the Twelfth Century*

HOW WE DID IT

It was on a very stormy morning in April, 1924, that two Club members conferred about a sad bit of news. Over the telephone the voice of one said to the other:

"The last stronghold of old Jamaica Plain is gone. The Greenough house is sold."

"But are you sure? Who has bought it? Can nothing be done?"

There was a brief consultation. Mrs. Greenough was called and very kindly agreed to receive two agitated Club members and within the half hour a small but energetic car carried them through a drenching rain to the hospitable door which has since become the door of home to the Tuesday Club.

The house was far along in dismantlement—the great mirrors had been taken from the walls—packing-cases stood about. It is no exaggeration to say that it was with a real heartache that the journey through the lovely rooms was made. What possibilities they held for a centre of club and community life!

The brief particulars of the sale revealed that the new owners were a group of associates buying for development, which meant a street through the center of the estate and either the possible destruction of the mansion or its removal to another site to be converted into a two apartment house. All the trees must go to make room for apartment houses and stores! And outside the steady down pour of rain was already swelling the lilac buds and pushing the green spears of the iris above the sod; through every window the garden looked in with mute appeal. Within doors the spirits of the long past seemed to crowd the spacious rooms. Their silent plea was strong.

"Can you afford to banish forever from your com-



The mansion as it is today

munity the inspiring influence of the past?" they seemed to say. "You are lavish with your treasures, have you so much that you can continue ruthlessly to destroy old beauty and make new ugliness?"

The two self-appointed investigators aroused much amazement during their subsequent calls that morning but gleaned little real information. Nobody's fault perhaps. Doubts of the sanity of the dripping strangers may have crossed the minds of those interviewed but "what you can do, you may do in fairyland" and Mrs. and Miss Columbus were afloat, headed for the open sea on a voyage of discovery which was to end in a land of promise.

After that day followed a period of conferences and appeals—a long voyage with no end in sight. All sorts of stories were in the air: one that a wealthy man, keenly interested in the preservation of New England antiquities and beautiful homes, wished to purchase. Visions of "Henry" hastening to the rescue caused a few rosy dreams but they faded into the light of common day—Henry himself disclaiming emphatically any such noble intention. Another rumor to the effect that the Masons were successfully negotiating for the purchase was found to have no basis in fact. In either case the Club would have rested content since its only purpose in assuming such a burden was to save for coming generations a beautiful example of the gracious living of the past.

An appeal was made to William Sumner Appleton. He was all sympathy and eager for the success of the enterprise but the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities of which he is Secretary had no available funds.

Both Mr. Appleton and Ralph Adams Cram, Boston's noted architect, pronounced the house a rare specimen of Colonial architecture, the destruction of which would be an irreparable loss.

The D. A. R. was already burdened with as much financial responsibility as it could assume.

At the Newton Women's Club in early May, the Tuesday Club held its spring luncheon served by the ladies of the hostess club. A reference made in one of the after-luncheon speeches to the possible purchase of the Greenough house was received with astonishing enthusiasm. "If we want it hard enough, we can have it" was the spirit of the meeting, heartily endorsed by the president of the Newton Club. As an incentive, she told of the early struggles and hard work put into their own enterprise. The Newton women, however, had accumulated \$18,000 and had the gift of a lot of land before starting to build, while the Tuesday Club had only \$1,000.

At the Board meeting of the Club that same week, a member was appointed to officially continue investigations as to acquiring the property with power to associate others with her to form a committee.

Little progress was made and hope was growing faint when one afternoon came another telephone call, this time with a definite proposition:

"Are you still interested in the purchase of the Greenough estate? If so, at what time can you meet with a committee of the associates to talk business?"

The answer was prompt: "At any time—within an hour if you wish." And within the hour the conference was held. As a result, a post card was sent to each Club member and to those on the waiting list, giving notice of a special meeting at the Unitarian Parish House on June 26 to decide the great question of purchase. Notwithstanding the heat and the vacation season, eighty came and many others availed themselves of the privilege to send a vote to the secretary.

An effort was made before the meeting to feel the pulse of the community, financially, as a governing factor in the decision. "What we need is a good-sized gift to start the ball rolling," said one of the committee. The response from another member was immediate, "I will give

you five hundred." The ball had begun to roll and other generous pledges began to come.

At the meeting of June 26 the matter was very thoroughly discussed, and when the final vote was taken, the decision was practically unanimous in favor of obtaining the property if it could be secured for a reasonable figure.

By a unanimous vote the entire waiting list was admitted to the Club and the membership raised to 350.

Then an enthusiastic Club member mounted the platform and, chalk in hand, recorded on the blackboard the pledges given from the floor. Four thousand dollars was raised at the meeting.

Mrs. Greenough had intended removing the old front door, part of the staircase with its beautiful hand-carved spindles and some of the original panelling. It was announced that she would waive her right of removal should the house become the property of the Tuesday Club.

The asking price of the estate was \$70,000. This was prohibitive and was regarded merely as a basis of negotiations. The entire property including house and 89,760 sq. ft. of land was finally purchased for \$53,000.

The intricate business details of the transaction were most ably managed by the President of the Club, who generously contributed the services of her lawyer.

The Club was most fortunate, also, in its Treasurer. Her financial accuracy and level-headed foresight in handling the large sums continually passing through the treasury made her services invaluable.

Contributions came in a gratifying way. By the middle of July when the papers were passed they amounted to \$7,400.

A loyal member of the Club advanced the collateral for the original loan of \$16,000 and the Institution for Savings in Roxbury and its Vicinity took the mortgage for \$30,000.

Before the decision was reached, architects, heating experts, realtors, and prominent business men, had all been

consulted as to the worth of the property and the amount of risk incurred, considered from a commonsense business viewpoint, untinged by sentiment.

The plan of purchasing just the mansion with merely enough land for a setting was considered and dismissed. It seemed better business to acquire and control the whole.

Mrs. George W. Mitten early came to the assistance of the Club by furnishing the card room on the second floor with salable antique pine and maple. Other beautiful pieces were placed through the house. The Club is allowed a percentage on all sales.

In September the house presented a busy scene. Painters, decorators, carpenters and other generous tradesmen of Jamaica Plain assumed responsibility for the renovation of certain portions of the main body of the house as a gift to the good cause. Very soon, with fresh paint and charming reproductions of old designs in wall paper, the house took on a new attractiveness.

It is impossible to enumerate here all the generous gifts and service that came to the house both then and through the year.

On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, October 16, 17, 18, a house-warming which took the form of an outdoor bazaar was held and netted \$2,500.

A goodly sum was raised during the year by dividing the Club into teams of ten with captains. Each team member pledged herself to contribute or earn \$25.

House rentals aggregated \$249.

The barn was used during the winter for motor storage and in the summer as a double garage.

The great attraction to the young people has been the tennis court. Early and late they have availed themselves of Club privileges. This is also a source of income.

A Trash and Treasure shop maintained on Centre street for three weeks earned \$431.

In November a Fashion Show was held at Eliot Hall. A talk on the styles by an expert from Filene's, illustrated

by living models, was followed by a group of debutantes who displayed their own lovely Paris frocks. This brought in \$77.

Beginning in December, a series of twelve delicious dinners were served by different committees on Thursday nights. The proceeds amounted to \$505.

A goodly check from a member of the Club made it possible to so increase the stock of silver and china that a much greater number could be served at the dinners and the labor of the committees lessened.

From the first of December tea was served every afternoon by Club members. This has already netted more than \$500.

Also on December first, a Gift Shop was opened at the house and on May 1 had earned \$613.

Two very successful evening bridges and a series of afternoon card parties gained \$614.

A breakfast served on May morning from 7 to 9 satisfied and delighted about 150 people and put into the treasury \$100.

On Christmas Eve the Club kept open house. Outside the door two little lighted trees stood as sentinels. The house was lovely with Christmas wreaths and the soft light of many candles. There was the added good cheer of open fires. A bunch of mistletoe hanging from a doorway into the hall tempted the frisky. George and Martha Washington received their guests in the parlor. In the dining room, punch, hot coffee, and doughnuts were served by stately dames in old-time costumes, from a table enchanting with white candles and a sparkling tree. The choir from the Unitarian Church came singing carols in which all joined at the last, and George Washington sang "When George the Third was King" with old-time vigor. Santa Claus put \$30 into the Christmas stocking which hung by the fireplace in the parlor. Guests were coming and going all the evening and nearly 150 friends joined in the good cheer.



Poor Richard's Tea Room

The last of March the Club cleared its indebtedness of \$23,000. In the summer of 1924 an unknown friend promised to give \$5000 when the Club had raised \$18,000 above its expenses—heat, light, repairs, labor, interest and taxes. In March this was accomplished, and a triumphant and eager group awaited the arrival of the gift. It came promptly—a certified cashier's check. The generous friend was still anonymous! Bless him just the same!

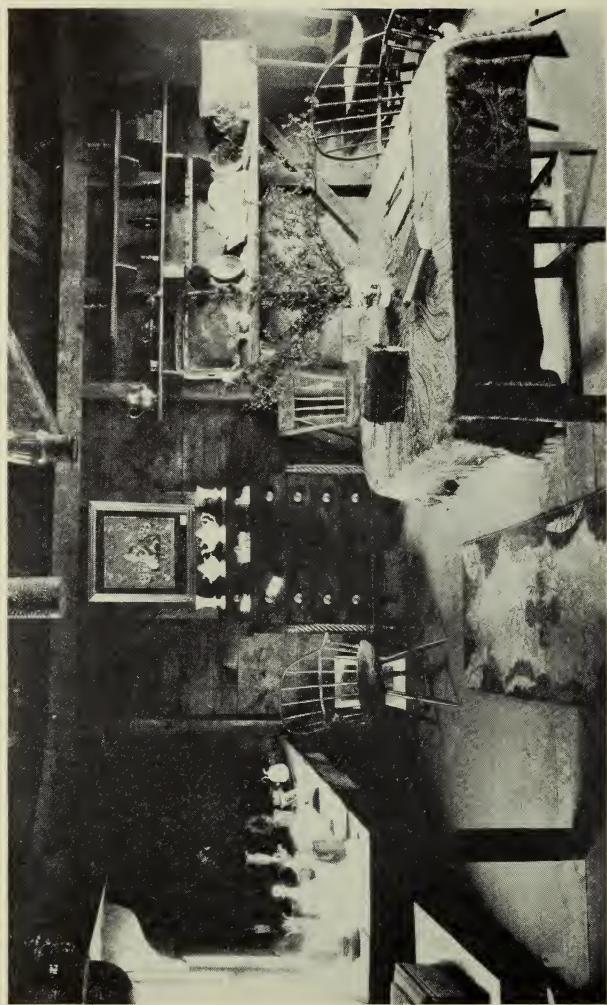
The last of March, also, the Club raised its membership to 400 and was incorporated under the laws of Massachusetts.

In May, Poor Richard's Tea Room was opened in the ell chamber over the arches. It is fascinating with Mrs. Walter Kilham's quaint decorations of mottoes and medallions illustrating Franklin's wise sayings. It is as gay with color as a butterfly's wing, and the wee fireplace gives cheerful warmth to the room on cool days for tea is served here every afternoon. Between the green Swiss curtains, the apple blossoms and the lilacs look in at you in spring-time. At the windows on the other side, the white wistaria nods in the breeze. This was the gun room in the old days and in the tiny closet was a fine collection of Indian arrows—a very valuable one were it still in existence.

Across the hall beneath the sturdy rafters is the antique shop, kept full of treasures by a discriminating committee and sold at decided bargains. In this room, too, is an ancient bench and a great chest which was the playhouse of a small boy years ago. A missing board left space through which he wriggled into the delightful, mysterious dark within; probably it was a refuge from Indians or a cave of treasure.

Leading from a diminutive entry between the two rooms—in the old dove cote—for every inch of space has been utilized, is the the summer gift shop. There you find the unusual gift for the unexpected occasion or the special friend.

An attractive sign, the work and gift of Mr. and Mrs.



The Antique Shop

Griswold Tyng, shows Poor Richard in black, trotting along a yellow landscape. It points the way to the ancient stairs up which you climb to all these delights.

A beautiful hanging sign at the entrance to the drive, designed by Theodore G. Hapgood in keeping with the colonial character of the place, was the generous gift of a former President.

The flag which floated for the first time on Decoration Day 1925, was given by a charter member as a memorial to her soldier husband.

Club members and their friends are continually giving and doing. It seems a competitive race in generosity.

And all this has been accomplished by the volunteer efforts of women whose lives seemed already full. They have worked—how they *have* worked! Vacations have been dispensed with and real sacrifices made that the patriotic purpose might be accomplished.

Relays of women have swept and dusted the house, each with a definite time for work; they have made and hung draperies; painted walls and furniture; they have raked and burned dead leaves and lawn mowers have merrily cut the grass under their guidance; they have planted and tended flowers and vegetables, and sold young plants and bulbs. One long flower bed has been kept bright by a friend of a former member of the Club—a fitting memorial to one who loved gardens.

Clearing the long stretch of sidewalk was a serious winter problem in point of expense till two members of the Club and a corps of young men and neighborhood boys volunteered to shovel snow.

We doubted when we began whether there was enough patriotic spirit left in Jamaica Plain to do this thing. Now we have the faith that has already raised \$29,566; we have the faith that will raise \$30,000 more!

The members of the Club are engaged in a great co-operative effort to preserve the best and the only historic mansion left in Jamaica Plain. With its setting of fine old

trees and nearly two acres of land, it is perhaps the most notable landmark in this part of Boston. We do this in order to make the manner of living of past generations a reality to those of the present and future. It is educational work, such as nations and cities throughout the world have endorsed and carried on. With us in New England, it seems destined to be a private concern. The responsibility is put squarely on our shoulders to carry on to success the work we have undertaken in order that the records of the lives of the fathers may be passed on to their children and their children's children. We are not afraid to ask our friends and neighbors to help us—we have earned the right by helping ourselves. Furthermore, the success of the Loring-Greenough House concerns everybody—is of importance to good Americans everywhere. It is a part of their heritage they should not let slip.

THE DAYS OF AULD LANG SYNE

*Interesting Data Relating to this Old Tory Estate
Compiled for a meeting of the Colonial Dames.*

By MRS. HAROLD C. ERNST.

From the recessed windows of the Greenough house in its early days a very different scene from that of today would have met the eyes. There was a modest, new wooden church where the stone one now stands, and near it a parsonage, which had been moved in 1758 from the spot this house now occupies, that the larger mansion might take its place. On the triangle where the soldiers' monument now stands was the village schoolhouse and on either side the two roads dividing as they do now.

The broad road sweeping to the right was the highway to Providence through Dedham over which for many years the daily express coach ran. Four relays of horses made the journey in four hours.

Broad meadows stretched on every side with fields,

orchards and gardens, part of the vast estate which belonged to Commodore Loring, owner and builder of the house.

Commodore Loring was one of the Tory gentry, of great prominence, it is said, in the town of Roxbury, where he was born. When of age he went to sea, rising to the command of a privateer, and later to commissions as captain and commodore in the British Navy. He took part in the capture of Quebec, and in succeeding campaigns in Canada. Having been severely wounded in the leg while in command on Lake Ontario, he was retired on half pay at the close of the war, and settled down on this estate which he had purchased in 1752. At that time the estate contained about one hundred acres, and the present house, the timbers of which are said to have been brought from England, was built in 1758.

For almost twenty years he lived here with his family, enjoying, we may suppose, the management of his estate, and the society of congenial neighbors, until the stirring times of the Revolution alienated many who had been friends, and finally drove the loyalists from their homes.

In these days and later the Jamaica end of the town of Roxbury was a favorite place of residence. Sir Francis Bernard, Royal Governor of Massachusetts from 1760 to 1769, had a beautiful estate near the pond, part of which is still intact; later Sir William Pepperell occupied the same premises. Captain Benjamin Hallowell, another ardent loyalist, lived in a house which until a few years ago was standing on the corner of Boylston and Centre Streets. John Hancock's residence was also here, until he left the town, offended by the harsh censure of the parish minister upon his carelessness in keeping the accounts of Harvard College, of which he was then treasurer. Curtis, Weld, Brewer, May, Whitney, Lowell are names early associated with the records of Jamaica Plain, so the social intercourse in such a community must have been of the most pleasant kind.

The famous Peacock Tavern stood a short distance from here, on the Dedham road at the corner of the present Allandale Road and Centre Street, and it was a favorite resort in its day, the special interest attaching to it being its purchase in 1794 by Samuel Adams, who resided there while he was governor of Massachusetts; and for the brief remainder of his life made it his summer residence.

But the life of comfort and contentment which Commodore Loring led here was destined to a rude ending. General Gage appointed him one of his select council, when the right to choose members of the Governor's Council was taken from the people and vested in the crown; and this brought upon him the opprobrium of his fellow townsmen, who in vain tried to persuade him to resign. His loyalty seems to have been strongly influenced by his fear of losing his half pay. This apprehension finally determined him, and it is recorded that "on the morning of the Lexington battle after passing most of the previous night in consultation with Deacon Joseph Brewer, his neighbor and intimate friend, upon the step he was about to take, he mounted his horse, left his house and everything belonging to it, and pistol in hand, rode at full speed to Boston."

In May of the same year, 1775, the house became General Greene's headquarters for a time, and Captain Pond's company from Wrentham also occupied the house, but it was soon converted into a hospital for the Roxbury Camp. A number of American soldiers who died of disease were buried on part of the estate, and it was not until 1867 that their remains were removed to a cemetery.

By an act of the General Court of April 30, 1779, the estates of notorious conspirators were confiscated, and Loring's "large mansion house, convenient outhouses, gardens planted with fruit trees, together with about sixty-five acres of mowing land" were sold at the Bunch of Grapes Tavern, in King Street, to the noted patriot Colonel Isaac Sears.

From Sears it passed to the widow Ann Doane, who married David Stoddard Greenough in 1784, and for five

generations it has been the home of his descendants. Portraits of Ann Doane and of David Stoddard Greenough formerly hung in the hall, and over the parlor mantel shelf hung the portrait of David Stoddard, grandfather of David Stoddard Greenough.

It is inevitable that some changes should have been wrought in the interior of the house, but they are not conspicuous, most of the old woodwork remains untouched by time. Only one of the original mantel shelves remains, however, and it is in an upstairs room.

In the hall the ponderous door key, and the strong bolts to the outer door remain. The front door proper is the one facing South Street. The Greenough family are in possession of a receipted bill signed by Bulfinch which seems to prove that somewhere in the architecture is the touch of his hand. This very doorway is ascribed to him by family tradition. It opens into a small entry, on either side of which the rooms were formerly used as parlor and living room; while the dining room was originally the one to the right of the present large hall and had direct connection with the kitchen behind it.

An unexpected link with the past was found in the early married days of a past owner of the house. A safe was to be put into a closet off the present dining room, and the supports under the floor were examined to see if they would bear the heavy weight. In pounding some timbers in the cellar beneath, they were found to have been placed so as to wall up a closet of cool bricks, and from this closet were brought to light a store of old wine bottles. Doubtless Commodore Loring expected to return to his home when the royal arms were successful, and had made sure of the safe-keeping of his wine in the meantime.

Old fire buckets formerly hung in the rear hall telling of days when householders had to depend on themselves and their neighbors to extinguish any flames which might assail their property.

Among treasured pieces of furniture handed down

through the generations there was to be seen a fine leather chest studded with brass nails bearing the date 1709 on its lid. It was the property of David Stoddard, and the bill of lading with which it was shipped from England is worthy of record.

“Shipped by the Grace of God in good order, and well conditioned by David Stoddard in and upon the good ship called the *Lucetania* where of is master under God for this present voyage Capt. John Wentworth, and now riding at anchor in the River of Thames and, by God’s Grace, bound for Boston in N. England. One Trunk of Merchantdize upon the proper Account and risque of Messrs. John Hunt and Abraham Francis being marked and numbered as in the Margent, and are to be delivered in like good order, and well conditioned at the aforesaid Port of Boston (the danger of the Seas only excepted) unto the said Hunt and Francis or to their assigns he or they paying Freight for the said Goods Fifteen Shillings and nine Pence with Primage and Avarage accustomed. In witness whereof the Master or Purser of the said ship hath affirmed to three Bills of Lading, all of this tenor and date; the one of which three Bills being accomplished, the other two stand void. And so God send the good ship to the desired Port in Safety. Amen.

Dated in London, February ye 10th, 1709.

Contents Unknown”.

J. WENTWORTH.

A touch of the feminine was preserved in a beautiful old vase filled with rose pot-pourri, made so long since that none knew whose hands had prepared it.

It is matter for congratulation that a few such houses still remain; visible bonds between the past and the present, to preserve which is a worthy undertaking for those who inherit the fruits of the past and shall pass on to the future evidences of the sturdiness and faith which built *homes* of beautiful proportion and design, and put honest workmanship into them.

*Eliot Press, Inc., Jamaica Plain
Boston, Mass.*

